

'That night is burned into my mind'

OUT of pocket, forced to shift and suffering post-traumatic stress — life has been tough on the family at the centre of the Waihi mine collapse a year ago today.

Steve and Barbara Kilgour's home was swallowed by the huge hole which opened up when an old labyrinth of mines far below caved in.

The couple and their three young children Bronson, Chavez and Zoe miraculously escaped with scratches and bruising, but 12 months on the disaster still greatly affects them.

They wrenched themselves from Waihi to start new lives on a modest lifestyle block near Dargaville, even though it meant leaving their friends behind.

"We had to get out. We found out the hard way that you could not trust the land beneath your feet," he said.

The world the Kilgours knew ended in the early hours of December 13, 2001, when they awoke to a nightmare.

As the earth opened up, their old wooden house toppled in, trapping two of the children and leaving Steve, Barbara and 12-year-old Bronson to clamber out of the wreckage and crawl their way to the surface.

Dazed and confused, it was left to firemen arriving at the scene to rescue Chavez, 11, and Zoe, 8, from their



RUINED . . . the collapsed house took the Kilgour family's peace of mind with it.

FILE PICTURE

bedrooms. "That night is burned into my mind — it was like a bomb had landed," he said.

The family, shocked, were quickly supported by friends just as an avalanche of publicity descended onto the gold mining town.

The stress of trying to get their lives back together eventually proved too much for Mrs Kilgour, who suffered a mental breakdown earlier this year —

ironically, just after a visit to Waihi.

She is recovering with the help of medication and Mr Kilgour being by her side because he is now a sickness beneficiary.

In their old Waihi days he was on the dole but like many others obtained part-time work to supplement the family income.

That all changed with the disaster, although for a long time he was unaware

they were suffering post-traumatic stress: "Talking to the old timers, they called it shell shock."

Mr Kilgour was having bouts of really feeling listless and moody. Even rainy days became too much for the former commercial fisherman. But other days he felt fine and life did not drag.

His condition finally dawned on him when he read a pamphlet describing the symptoms of post-traumatic stress. He was officially diagnosed and was stepped up to a sickness benefit.

"We are getting ourselves together, but it has been slow," Mr Kilgour said.

In their own little ways, even the children show a few scars from that night. One child insists on having a night light on in their bedroom and sometimes they want to be on their own.

Meanwhile, payments to property owners directly caught up in the collapse and those subsequently identified as living in hazard zones looks like settling at around \$3 million.

The good news from Hauraki District Council chief executive Langelty Cavers is that a big corner of Waihi's downtown commercial and residential area is likely to be spared being declared a hazard zone and evacuated.

Mr Cavers said drilling had shown the rock above the old Edward South

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